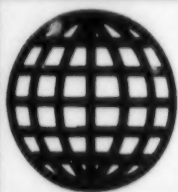


JPRS-NEA-94-022

3 May 1994



**FOREIGN
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JPRS Report

Near East & South Asia

***ALGERIA;
Escape From Lambese***

Near East & South Asia

ALGERIA:

Escape From Lambese

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Physical Features of Prison; Attack Described

94AF0171A Algiers EL MOUDJAHID in French
15 Mar 94 pp 6-7

[Article by Mouloud Benmohamed: "The Lambese Prison: The Mystery of a Breakout"—first paragraph is EL MOUDJAHID introduction; final two paragraphs are from APS]

[Text] For one hour and 15 minutes, armed groups beleaguered the village of Tazoult and the Lambese prison so as to allow a great number of prisoners to escape and to steal firearms. This happened last Thursday, at the time of the call to prayer. Everything had been prepared in great detail. A commission of inquiry made up of members from the ministries of justice, the interior, and defense, has been on site since yesterday.

How could the prisoners at Lambese-Tazoult escape?

The question has been plaguing the minds of all Algerians who never believed such an escape could happen in the most feared prison in Algeria. Its reputation has just fallen like a house of cards. Anything is possible when a or some prison guards (their number makes no difference; all it takes is a single accomplice for internal security measures to be useless) join with the attackers.

When you have gotten to know this prison in connection with a report on prison conditions, when you have spoken at length with prisoners in their cells, when you have met death row inmates who have been waiting to be pardoned or executed for years in this grim corridor of death, when you have moved about in these detention areas with their walls as thick as a 400-year-old oak tree, when you have observed that it takes a fairly long time to walk the distance separating the cells from the main gate, when you have counted more than 15 reinforced metal gates between the first cell and the first area where you regain your freedom, you can only be puzzled, flabbergasted, you can only be stupefied and speechless when you learn that an escape of... "900" prisoners took place in the harshest prison in Algeria.

This figure, which is neither confirmed nor denied, and the news could make a mute talk. You're aghast. You don't believe your ears and your eyes.

In that place, they don't lock up just any prisoner, just any small-time criminal or pickpocket. In that place they keep only the most hard core, the most difficult, the most recalcitrant, the most undisciplined, the ones who have lost everything (sentenced to die, to a life sentence, to long terms) but one tiny hope of regaining their freedom by whatever means possible.

At the Breaking of the Fast

The Lambese-Tazoult prison, located 12 km from Batna, below the village of Tazoult, is not a simple annex or a preventive agency or a primary reeducation institution. It is a readaptation prison just as are those at El Asnem or Berrouaghia.

In accordance with Article 26 of Order 72-2 dated 10 February 1972 codifying the prison and reeducation system, this prison is charged with "receiving prisoners serving prison sentences of or greater than one year, prisoners

sentenced to solitary confinement with hard labor, and habitual lawbreakers, regardless of the length of their term."

You don't leave this prison (nor do you enter it) the way you leave your own home. That is to say, with complete freedom, without informing someone beforehand.

From the individual or common cell, from the detention room to the main entrance gate, a minimum of 15 keys is required. Every time you enter or leave one place to go to another, from one corridor to another, you have to open and reclose a heavy metal gate or a metal grill behind you. This action—a rite—must be repeated each time by the director, the guard, or the head of detention until he is back on the street.

To reach the street, you cross several long corridors, courtyards, very extensive spaces, and the detention area; everywhere you walk along very high walls and barred windows. The smallest door, even the one to the broom closet, is triple-locked. There is a stout lock plus two dead bolts that are kept shut with a padlock.

Guards everywhere. Reeducation agents. Of every age but especially young men. Those walking the enclosure walls are armed, and so are the others, though less heavily, but their most important weapon is the bunch of keys by which the gates open and close, get pushed and pulled, get unlocked and locked as they groan, as they slide, and as they almost creak. Nothing is done without a noise. Nothing is done that does not attract attention. Everything is known or at least should be known when the guards are doing their duty, are on the lookout, when the guards have their eyes open, their ears to the ground, and their minds alert. Most, if not the majority, of these reeducation agents, called guards, live or reside in the village of Tazoult, which overlooks the prison. This is not a detail, it is extremely important to understand what happened, what took place last Thursday.

The first information received makes it possible to state that this was not a mere escape just put together by some prisoners or planned with a little outside support. No. This was very much a premeditated, prepared operation; a "strike" that was conceived and refined in every way; it was a plan that was thought through in its execution, calculated as to its phases, and drawn up in its organization. It was an operation, a "strike," a plan that left nothing to the imponderable, to the unexpected, to chance. It was planned. Everything was planned with respect to the sites, the prisoners, and the number of policemen and gendarmes in the area!

Even the nails were planned.

Before providing some details, still unofficial, a word about the director of the prison who is the top man responsible for security in the prison

First, he is a native of Tazoult but he lives in the prison. In a company house, obviously. He is known to most of the residents of the area. Next, he is a man who enjoys a good reputation in the prison community, where he has been an employee for 22 years. He is too young to have been sentenced to death or sent to prison during the colonial period like most of the heads of prisons. Just the same, he is well acquainted with the premises and his "inmates."

One Prisoner With Four BAs!

Who are the prisoners at Lambese-Tazoult?

There are minors in a special ward. They are kept quite apart from the areas where those who are more than 18 years old are kept.

There are the common criminals. Most are criminals (the others have been sentenced for having committed punishable crimes). One murdered a member of his family over a will; one thought it useful to kill a wife he thought had bad habits and, 10 years after the crime, is sorry about it; there is one who killed his neighbor and yet another who took part in gang rapes.... Among them some try to improve themselves. For example, there is one student. Here a parenthesis: four former death row prisoners sat for their BA exams, and they passed! One of them took up the challenge of doing his BA four times: in literature, science, mathematics, and sciences cum laude. "I wanted to prove I could do it. I promised myself I would get the BA cum laude. I did," he told us. Since then, these former death row inmates have seen their sentences commuted and been pardoned. They are studying tax law! Let's close this parenthesis.

Last there are those who were sentenced by the special courts under the law on terrorism. There is everyone from the death row inmate to the prisoner sentenced to three years in solitary confinement and including those serving life sentences, 20-year sentences, 15-year sentences, etc. Most of them are young.

The eldest is 77. He is in prison for the rest of his life for the voluntary homicide of a cousin who had cut him out of his will.

After all of that, there are some questions:

How could such a large number of prisoners escape?

Did they have accomplices? If they did, at what level? What preventive security measures were taken?

What security conditions existed before the breakout? Internal but also external security, i.e., around and in the immediate environs of the prison.

How did the guards in charge of the prison's internal security react?

Did they have adequate arms and munitions?

Were the prisoners forewarned? Had they prepared themselves for the escape?

There are a thousand and one questions to which the commission of inquiry that has been set up—and has been at the scene of the escape since yesterday afternoon—will try to find answers so as to assign responsibility. But, as of now, we can report these words by the director of the prison who told us that "no one could have done anything whatsoever about it."

By that it should be understood that it was unavoidable, given the circumstances and the methods.

How was this possible?

What exactly had taken place?

How could the escape have happened?

For the moment there is very little official information. Except bits and pieces gathered from trustworthy sources.

The "Strike" Was Prepared

Several hours before the escape, residents of Tazoult noticed a certain amount of frenetic activity, a lot of strangers in the village. Most were young people.

"It's residents of Batna doing their errands before the breakfast hour," some thought.

"It's the feast of the Aid. Things are normal. They think it's less expensive to buy clothing for their children from the stores in Tazoult. How naive," others said.

No one suspected that trucks covered with tarpaulins carrying armed men were waiting for the call to prayer to begin the operation. Some among this latter group would wait for the end of the call to prayer and the practicing's return home—almost all of them prison management employees—to move about in Tazoult. There were several dozen armed men who blocked all the roads leading out of the surrounded village who took possession of the streets and alleys. In this way prison guards were prevented from leaving their homes to help defend the besieged prison. Some of these men waited for the gendarmerie brigade and the Tazoult district police. Given their small numbers, security agents were impotent. It was impossible for them to contain the attack. Even less possible to repulse it. There was a greater number of attackers. A very great number. There were several armed groups who came from different areas. On trucks and on light vehicles. Judging from appearances, the "strike" had been in preparation for several weeks. The possibility cannot be excluded that the terrorist acts and attacks in the Algiers and Oran areas were supposed to create a diversion.

Several moments before armed groups beleaguered Tazoult and attacked the two security posts—at the very moment of the call to prayer (the call to prayer was supposed to have acted as a signal)—one of the prison guards who was on duty at the main gate—an accomplice—ordered his colleague to hand him his keys to open the gate. The latter refused. There was an outburst of voices. The director who was at prayers was notified. He thought there was an altercation between colleagues and he spoke to two of them from his window. At that moment the accomplice fired a round of shots and the guard dropped dead. The weapon was aimed at the window and there were one, then two rounds of shots. The director went looking for his gun to shoot back; the prison guard who was the accomplice took advantage to open the main gate. Three trucks covered with tarpaulins entered the prison at the same time as a Golf and two white vehicles. The attackers jumped off and shot. Prison staff fired back. There were rounds of fire, exchanges of bullets, then the greater number of attackers dispersed in three groups.

The first group went to the administrative block and the isolation cells. The second destroyed the alarm signal and set about looking for the weapons room in the hope of stealing some Kalashnikovs and light modern arms from it. A few moments later, using guns, the locks on the weapons storage room were "blown off." There were in fact sophisticated weapons, or they were the latest model, for the attackers took possession of automatic Belgian pistols, Chicom, Mat-49's dating from the war of independence, and munitions.

They stole 133 weapons, all of which would be recovered in the first hours of the search operation. Ditto for the munitions. During this time, the third group of attackers fanned out through the detention areas. The locks and dead bolts of the cells and cell blocks were blown away with gunfire. The first to escape were the death row inmates whose death row cells are off the common rooms. These were prisoners sentenced to die by the three special courts and common criminals. Next the prisoners serving life sentences and long terms escaped. Some common criminals did as well. Some prisoners—common criminals and special courts [prisoners]—refused to follow the attackers. Others—a large number that has not been officially announced—did not hesitate. Freedom was so close. But it would not last long for 79 of them who would be arrested whereas others would be gunned down during the search, which grew more intense hour by hour. The region was cut off. Even local residents took part.

After about one hour and 15 minutes, the three groups got back together and withdrew leaving dead and wounded behind them. As they fled, for the second time they strewed nails on the pavement, which prevented police from reaching the prison. The tires on their vehicles blow out.

This would be the second time, since security forces had already been blocked when they arrived by blocks of stone, nails, and even a bulldozer placed on the main access road leading to the prison. The road was blocked!

The trucks made escape in every direction easier. Particularly towards the nearby mountains. With them were seven prison guards.

Were they accomplices? The inquiry will show that. They were shields, some think.

The search was started a few moments later. A security team was set up. The security services combined their forces. The search is carried out even at night.

Thirty-nine people among the escapees and the attackers are arrested several hours later, and (towards 1600) the number rises to 79 arrested and 24 others shot. Those searches continue as we go to press.

In the wake of escapes from the reeducation centers at Sidi Ghiles (Tipaza), Blida, and the Serkadji van (which was headed towards Tazoult), last Thursday's [escape] urgently poses the question of security in prisons. If we can say that inside the prison security was not ensured as the most ordinary of citizens might believe, i.e., with a large number of security guards having modern weapons and armed to the teeth, we might note that no team was set up on the outside.

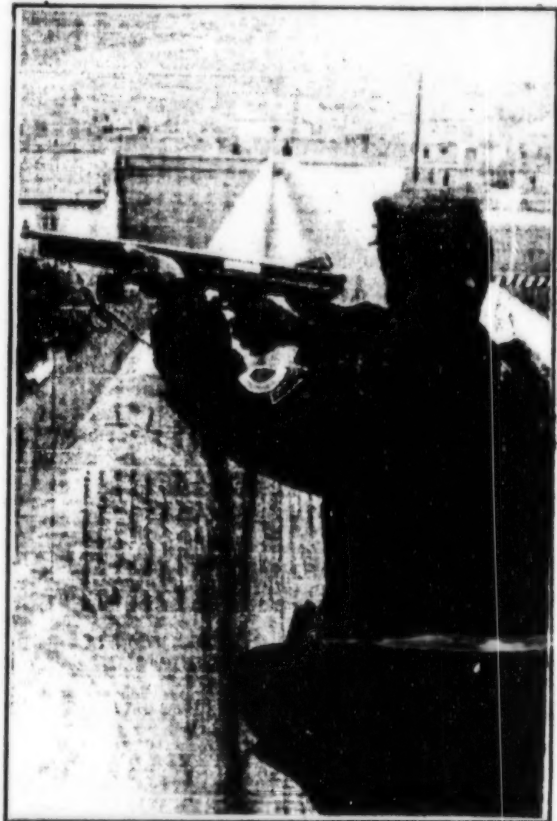
That is to say, around the prison. Last January, a few hundred meters away from the Lambese prison, the bodies of three murder victims were discovered: the father, father-in-law, and cousin of one staff member who had been receiving threats. An external security force was more than indispensable. It was vital. Both for the prison and for the reputation of the forces of law and order which seems to be picking up again as they pursue the attackers and escapees.

What happened last April at the Berroughia prison led the concerned authorities to set up reinforced surveillance posts and implement an appropriate security team all around these prisons, whose running brings honor or dishonor to the state's authority.

Seventy-Nine Escapees Arrested, 24 Shot

Seventy-nine individuals who escaped from the Tazoult prison have been arrested and 24 others shot by police who recovered a large number of weapons, a communique issued by security forces yesterday announced.

The search and surround operations are still being pursued, it went on to say.



From this enclosure wall located over the second entrance gate, you can easily observe the outside of the prison, that is to say Tazoult. It was at this very place that one of the accomplices stood who attacked a guard using a tear gas bomb. When you carefully observe the prison's exterior, the possibility cannot be overlooked that he gave or received the signal.

Tactics To Impede Security; Help Escapees

94AF0171B Algiers EL MOUDJAHID in French
18-19 Mar 94 p 2

[Article by Mouloud Benmohamed: "The Lambese Prison: The Scenario for the Breakout"]

[Text] About fifty prisoners freed! A day of reprieve. Lambese experiences an extraordinary morning. Or rather, it would be an extraordinary day.

An extraordinary morning for those who will be with their loved ones on the day of Aid El-Fitr. They are pleased even if they are not happy.

An extraordinary day for the others. For the prison guards. For the director of the Lambese prison. For the people of the "village" of Tazoult. For everyone. Except the dead: one guard dead, three wounded, another about whom there is no word. Regarding the attackers, no one can come up with a figure for dead and wounded.

Extraordinary too because the main gate of the most famous and feared prison in Algeria will once again close behind the approximately 50 pardoned prisoners only to be reopened with fire and blood a few hours later thanks to the help from accomplices.

Five Accomplices?

Presumably the escape plan was based—at a minimum—on five prison guard accomplices.

Who are they?

They were guards who had recently been transferred.

Three came from Barika. Two of them were reported to be closely linked to the main organizer of the breakout from the Barika prison. They were reported to have asked to be transferred before it happened.

At the time of the attack, according to testimony given and statements made, the five accomplices were situated as follows.

The first—who was not on duty at the time of the events and was supposed to be in the dining hall to break the fast—went to main gate No. 1 to kill his colleague in order to take the keys away from him and open the gate.

Two others—on duty—were several meters above, i.e., at main gate No. 2, which provides access to the detention areas. One was beside this gate, the other on the enclosure wall was talking and perhaps waiting for the signal.

Last, two others were on duty in the corridor leading directly to the cells of prisoners sentenced to die, the cell blocks, and the common rooms.

The possibility cannot be excluded that there were even more accomplices because certain guards—who were on leave or on duty—have not returned to their posts.

A sixth—who was at the observation post to the right of the main gate—was kidnapped or taken hostage. He put up courageous resistance until he had no more ammunition.

What was the attackers' main objective?

It would seem that the objective was—mainly—freeing the death row inmates who were transported by truck and vehicle. Next the other prisoners who had been sentenced by the special courts and those common criminals were sent in the direction of the mountains—a road different from the one taken by the death row inmates. Some of the escapees did not even see these vehicles. That is to say that special treatment had been anticipated for the death row inmates.

Tracer bullets were fired at the time of the attack and at the end of the breakout to allow the armed groups that had taken over Tazoult's streets to regroup. There were also tracer bullets, several local residents emphasized, at the time

the police arrived and at whom one group of attackers fired several kilometers away from the prison.

Let us remind our readers that security forces were prevented from intervening by vehicles (with their tires blown out) placed in two different locations located on two arteries leading to the prison. These were private passenger cars, one bulldozer, and triangular nails.

One reeducation guard stated: "One member of my family was accompanying me to the prison where I was supposed to go on duty. I was dressed in civilian clothes. As we were driving there, we were stopped by a false roadblock. Some armed men made us get out. They put the car in the middle of the road after blowing out its tires. I do not know if I would be alive if they had asked to see my identification papers. They sent us away... I was supposed to go to work. I took a path through the fields. As I was walking, I saw about 50 armed men talking... This was before the call to prayer. They were at the valley. They didn't say anything to me... Yes, the vehicle was recovered by the member of my family."

On the side of Tazoult that local residents reached in vehicles, it was the same story except that the vehicles were used to transport the prison escapees in the direction of the edge of the forest. Drivers did not hand them over willingly. "There was a gun to my head," one of them said. Some are reported to have found a thank-you note at the end of the operation for "assistance rendered" to the attackers!

How was the most spectacular attack and breakout in our country organized? Was there passivity? Negligence? The commission of inquiry will certainly reveal this. But "when you smell a rat," as the popular saying goes, nothing is impossible.

How did the prison guards react? Let us say only that the law prohibits them from taking action outside the prison.

Let us also say that inside the prison, they are really and truly...unarmed. Some time ago certain foreign voices thought that Algerian prisons were places of torture and extortion. And to think that the guards are not even armed!

What is more: the guards who have to ensure security on the enclosure wall and warn of any revolt had...10 bullets each. Was this negligence? Sloppiness? Complicity? Not at all. "A quantity of munitions only to maintain order," we were told. "Events" that have taken place in the prisons of other countries have left hundreds of fatalities. Even though they are not attacks! At Lambese, there were no reports of wounded or dead among the prisoners. There is no end of questions. It is hard to answer. Except if you opt for suppositions. Still, a trustworthy source from outside the prison who asked to remain anonymous stated the following, among other things: "Information circulated that the strike would happen a year ago. Fortunately the prison administration changed certain members of the staff who were suspect. District police and the gendarmerie brigade were looked at. The prison, too. We learned that the movement began in the cells and ended outside, contrary to what has been said, namely that the gate was opened. That is not true. It might be that there was a signal from the prison, you can see the mountains.... There are signs...some

very serious negligence. There was passivity involved, not to mention complicity..."

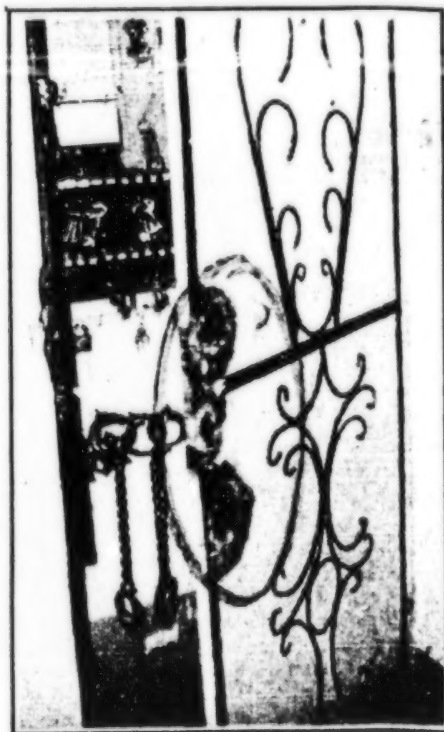
What was happening outside before, during, and after the breakout?

Armed men had encircled Tazoult, which was completely under their control. One prison guard reported as follows:

"These were strangers. With guns in their hands, they ordered us not to move. People everywhere were taken by surprise. They told us: 'Stop,' 'Hands up,' 'What's your profession?,' 'On the ground,' 'Crouch,' 'Lie down flat, stomach down.' We stayed that way about two hours. None of us could say a single word. 'We're brothers, Mujahadeen,' 'Pray for us' they said to old women who were going to the mosque. People didn't understand a thing. It was a surprise. There were rounds of shots a bit further away. Everywhere there was something odd. We hadn't understood anything about what they wanted."

After a moment the guard went on as follows: "It was terrible. I cannot sleep any more... If one of them had searched me, he would have found my professional card, then shot. No one could say a word. We were crouched down, we had our hands up or we were lying on the ground... Ever since we have not eaten, we cannot sleep any more, we are anxious. The colonial enemy did not do this."

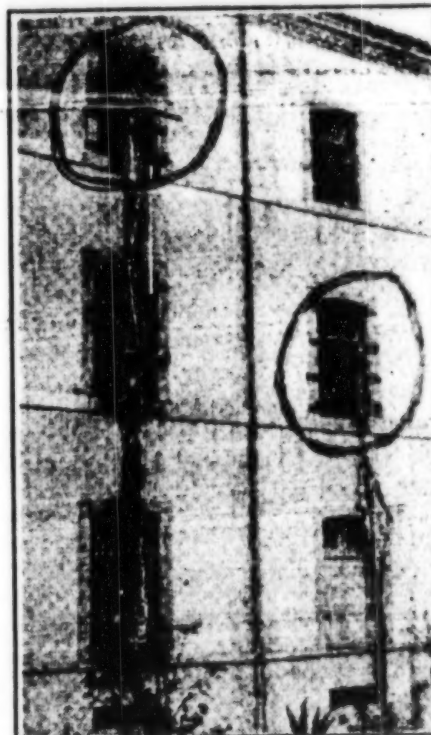
During this time, "most of the troop" was in the vicinity of the prison. At exactly the same time the prison guards broke their fast.



The door to the place where the keys were kept was completely broken.



Management entrance. Bullet impact can be seen. Above, window in the director's residence.



Youth ward (18 to 27 years old). Our photo shows windows whose bars were broken. Sheets tied together served as ropes and made escape possible.

Recaptured Prisoners Tell Their Story*94AF0171C Algiers EL MOUDJAHID in French
18-19 Mar 94 p 3*

[Interviews with four recaptured prisoners by Mouloud Benmohamed; place and date not given: "The Lambese Prison: Five [as published] Escapees Speak"—first paragraph is EL MOUDJAHID introduction]

[Text] "The attackers were wearing prison guard uniforms." "Some were wearing military uniforms." "There were vehicles in which the death row inmates were driven away." "No. There weren't any vehicles." Even if they seem contradictory, these reports by escapees—who were either arrested or taken into custody—tell us one thing at least. Or rather they confirm something. The breakout was carefully organized down to the tiniest detail. We spoke with five of the recaptured prisoners. [sentence as published] Their statements are more than eloquent.

M.M. (Serving a Life Sentence): "Get Out or Die"

[Benmohamed] How did you escape?

[M.M.] I have been in jail for three years. I was sentenced to life in prison. I was alone in my cell, I had just broken the fast and heard shouts of "Allahu Akbar." For me, that was the usual thing, so I didn't try to find out anything else. Suddenly there were shouts. Some people were breaking the locks on the cells. One of them opened the door to my cell with some keys and he spoke to me saying: "Get out!" He had a Kalashnikov rifle and I was standing opposite him, next to the bed. I asked him: "Where?" He answered: "The mountains." "Why?" I asked. He then loaded his weapon and told me: "Either you get out or I shoot you. You have a choice. It's up to you to decide but do it soon or I'll decide for you." What should I do? I got out. Once I was at the main entrance gate, another armed man pointed out the road I should take and repeated "go up to the mountains." There were a lot of us. I was among the last ones.

[Benmohamed] Did you notice any vehicles in front of the prison's entrance gate?

[M.M.] No, no vehicle.

[Benmohamed] Then what happened?

[M.M.] A few minutes later, maybe a half hour, we stopped running to rest.

[Benmohamed] How many of you were there?

[M.M.] Between 50 and 60 prisoners. We were in the middle of the forest. One of the armed men asked us to split into two groups. In one there were those who had been sentenced by the special courts and in the other the common criminals. Then he spoke to the common criminals saying: "As of now, we don't know you; may Allah help you." He was the oldest one, 35 or 36 years old. He had a beard. He was wearing a prison guard uniform. He set off together with the men who were accompanying him and the special court prisoners. As for us, we went in our direction. We walked day and night in the mountains. There were 10 of us. We consulted one another. On the second day, the eve of the Aid, I couldn't fast. We had nothing to eat. On Sunday I suggested to my companions that we become prisoners. We were eating grass. They didn't agree with me because they were afraid. We were in the Ain Touta mountains. As of that moment,

my companions began to distrust me. In the evening, I pretended to go off to tend to my bodily functions in the forest and left them. I walked for a long time at night. I was cold and hungry. I made a wood fire to warm up. I was very tired. On Tuesday, at dawn, I saw a military roadblock. I came down from the mountains and went straight towards the soldiers. I raised my arms as a sign that I meant no harm. I became a prisoner. That morning I was introduced to the prosecutor. I have just been sent to the Lambese prison. Between yesterday, when I was an escapee, and today, when I'm a prisoner, it's the difference between life and death. These aren't human beings.

[Benmohamed] Why?

[M.M.] They get us out of prison, they send us to the mountains, then they leave us in the middle of nowhere. Nothing to eat, no notion of the road, no money...No.

I was forced to escape. Either escape or die. Anyone else in my shoes would have done the same thing. That's what I told the prosecutor. I wasn't the only escapee in his office. There are others who are waiting to be questioned.

[Benmohamed] Have they become prisoners?

[M.M.] Some yes. Most were arrested. There are a lot of them.

B.M. (Sentenced by the Special Court in Constantine, the "Fax Network"): "Why Escape?"

[Benmohamed] Could you say why you took part in the breakout?

[B.M.] I was sentenced by the special court in Constantine as part of the fax network. I taught computer science at the university of Batna. I've got three years left to serve. I didn't take part directly in the escape.

[Benmohamed] But you're an escapee...

[B.M.] Yes, I'm an escapee. I got out of the prison because I had problems. The prison gates were open for everyone. I had to leave the prison just like everyone else.

Together with all the prisoners who had been sentenced by the special courts, I was in room 10. We heard rounds of gunfire; we started to look through the windows and we didn't understand. The lights were out for about a half hour; then the door to the room was opened by an armed man who told us: "All your companions have gone; you have to leave the room." So we all left, no problems, no obstacles, all the doors to the cells and the prison were open, everyone got out without any problems. I did the same thing but I understood that it wasn't normal. I didn't want to have any problems.

[Benmohamed] Did you notice something unusual on the day of the breakout? Was it planned for that day?

[B.M.] Everything was normal. Personally I wasn't warned.

I'm convinced it was the same for my fellow prisoners. We were all thinking about a general amnesty on the eve of the Aid. Nobody, as far as I know, was informed with regard to this escape.

[Benmohamed] What happened once you were outside?

[B.M.] The prisoners were sent towards the mountains. There were a lot of people. I too went in the direction of the mountains but I stopped just behind the houses of Tazoult.

Two hours later, once there was nobody else around, I decided to return to the prison. From afar, I saw that the prison gates were shut. There were also some gendarmes, policemen, and soldiers. I was afraid. So I took the Batna road. On the road I met a police car. I turned myself over to them and I spent the night at the police station.

[Benmohamed] Why did you turn yourself over to the policemen?

[B.H.] First, I've been sentenced to a short term. So why should I escape and risk a longer one? Second, I was expecting an amnesty. What the newspapers are writing proves that the situation is going to improve with the arrival of the president. So why should I escape? I'm not convinced about escaping, about creating anarchy and experiencing other problems. That's my opinion. When he came the president said two words to us: "Fraternal dialogue." That's the main thing. I'm convinced, so why push? It's better to wait for a solution for everyone.

Furthermore, I didn't want to leave because the mountain isn't easy. You need an organization and I'm not part of it. I don't have any weapons. To go means dying. I have five children. I chose to analyze the situation.

[Benmohamed] Were your fellow prisoners of the same opinion?

[B.M.] Some were. These were university teachers and engineers who were expecting a pardon. They were expecting a rahma. They were even afraid of even more serious problems. I should mention to you that these were prisoners sentenced by the special courts, all for terms of under five years. They have nothing to do with the blood that's been shed.

The others think the president should demonstrate his sincerity and accessibility by, for example, issuing an amnesty to the prisoners to encourage dialogue. I'm speaking of amnesty on behalf of prisoners who have no link to crimes connected with terrorism. Who forced this multi-party system of which we're the victims? They wanted to imitate Europe. There are other problems to solve. Personally I'm back in prison while my children have been left to themselves.

B.M. (Sentenced to a 12-Year Term): "I Turned Myself Over to the Gendarmerie"

[Benmohamed] What happened at the time of the breakout?

[B.M.] I'm the No. 2 man in room 20, where there were only special court prisoners. Two or three minutes after the Maghreb, there were gunshots. We thought there was a revolt in room 11. Certain prisoners told us: "No. The brothers are here."

[Benmohamed] In your opinion, did they know about the escape?

[B.M.] Perhaps. You can't tell. No one trusts anyone. There were 42 of us. Next, there was some noise, some shouts, and some rounds of gunfire. One of us broke a bed to break the lock with an iron bar. That didn't help. Some of us prevented him from breaking down the door. Through the window we saw a guard run upstairs. Behind him there were some armed men. We called to them to open our door. They asked us to wait. We were the last ones to leave. Then we escaped. When I got to the entrance

gate to the prison I saw a Golf that was taking one of the death row inmates away from the infirmary. He had lost both his legs in an altercation before his arrest. It seems he's their chief. Everyone was in a rush. I saw the death row prisoners in the vehicles. As for me, I left on foot. With me were only special court prisoners sentenced to detention. Some were accompanied by cars up to the edge of the forest. I decided to part company with them because I knew it would end badly. I slipped between the houses. I met a man I asked to show me where the police headquarters were. You could hear rounds of gunshots everywhere. He advised me to flee saying they were going to kill me. This man was one of the attackers and I didn't know it. I was going to tell him that the prison had been attacked but I shut up when I saw he was dressed strangely. He asked me if I was a brother and I answered that I was. Then he pointed behind the buildings to show me the mountains. I pretended I was following. Once I had escaped I hid. Then I recognized some guards in town. I went up to them and I explained things to them. Finally the gendarmerie came. I became a prisoner.

[Benmohamed] Did you notice anything abnormal before the breakout?

[B.M.] No. That morning some prisoners were pardoned. Those who were in the same room with me weren't affected. They said they would leave the prison by force just as they had been jailed. We'll get out by force, they said.

S.D. (Serving a Life Sentence): "I Followed Them, I Was Forced To"

[S.D.] At the breaking of the fast, there were rounds of gunfire and gunshots. We went to the windows. I saw the prisoners leave and run. I hadn't understood anything because we saw people wearing uniforms and carrying weapons. They opened the door to our room and told us to get out.

We were all special court prisoners. As we left the prison, we were sent towards the mountains. As we were walking, there was an armed man practically every 100 meters. I couldn't follow them because my leg hurt. I tried to flee them. I left because I was afraid they'd kill me. After 2 km, we stopped. One of them spoke to us. He told us that we weren't obligated to follow him to the mountains. He gave 200 Algerian dinars to anyone who didn't want to go up to the mountains. I thought and I decided to go to Batna. I walked through the night and I hid in the countryside. It was cold and I was hungry. My leg hurt. In the morning in Batna, I bought some bread and I hid in order to eat. I couldn't fast... Truly, I was afraid when I saw all those armed men. I'm not trying to justify myself; it was the truth.

Guards Recall Events of Prison Escape

94AF0171D Algiers EL MOUDJAHID in French
21 Mar 94 pp 2, 3

[Interviews with four prison guards by Mouloud Benmohamed; place and date not given in several instances: "The Lambese Prison: Guards Face Gunfire"—first paragraph is EL MOUDJAHID introduction]

[Text] Accounts by prison guards who responded to the attack are a source of information that can teach us a great deal. They provide good information on the tactics that were used. At the same time. [text as published]. The accomplices acted at the same time. That means that if the

attackers had been prevented from entering, even so the prisoners could have left their cells and attacked the guards from the other direction. The latter would not have been able to do anything. They did not have enough ammunition. "We had just enough bullets to discourage an uprising," we were told. We have learned that the guards on duty in the detention quarter, i.e., in the corridors, in common rooms, and in cell blocks, were not carrying any weapons (this is a tradition).

A.D.: "Betrayed By Ourselves"

Seriously wounded, for a long time this prison guard resisted from the observation post to the right of the main gate to the Lambese prison. Possessed of exemplary courage and composure, this man stood up, alone, to the attackers who outnumbered him. In the operating wing of Batna's university hospital center, he is under observation. He runs the risk of losing his left leg. Despite his pain and with medical authorization, he was willing to talk to us.

[A.D.] I was at the observation post. Just after the call to prayer. I was getting ready to break the fast. Things were normal. There were three guards, including the one who died. Suddenly there were gunshots. I looked and at that moment they fired at me. There were a lot of them. I fired towards the outside. Once they fired on me from the outside. The gate had been opened for them. They wounded me. I fell and lost consciousness.

[Benmohamed] How do you feel?

[A.D.] Not well.

[Benmohamed] Had you noticed something abnormal?

[A.D.] Very little car traffic about three-quarters of an hour before breakfast. At the entrance there was no one. It was when I looked that I noticed vehicles and armed men. My colleague, the accomplice, was standing a bit further up while everyone was in the mess hall. That was abnormal. We were betrayed by ourselves. If we hadn't, the attackers wouldn't have been able.

M.E.H. (In the Sentry Box): "Impossible Without Accomplices"

[M.E.H.] A minute after the call to prayers, I heard gunshots and rounds of fire. I didn't know where they were coming from.

I was in sentry box No. 8 where there's no telephone.

My colleague who was on duty in sentry box No. 3, not far away, called out to me. I thought they had fired at him. But it was the chief of the detention post located at main gate No. 2, below enclosure wall No. 5, who had called me to ask to go back up guards who were under attack.

We ran but they fired on us from the street from a truck. We fired back. Once we got to wall No. 5 we fired. Its gate was open. Alas, we could do nothing. We each had 10 bullets with us. I had a Mag 51 that was made in 1936. Without ammunition I hid near wall No. 4 until the soldiers came. The attackers were dressed differently; some were wearing our uniforms, others military uniforms, others Afghan clothes, and some others were wearing other clothing... M.L.B., my colleague, was the only one to have a Thompson and three loaders with 80 bullets. We really didn't have working weapons. We were in danger. We couldn't even

defend ourselves. If the five guards hadn't been accomplices, this couldn't have happened. The strategic post, where the access door to the detention area is located, was under the orders of an accomplice. We were afraid for our lives. We fought back with what we had, that is to say 10 bullets. You can't even defend yourself with that.

A.S. (Head of a Guard Post): "I Heard Some Cries"

[A.S.] Everything was normal when the day guard staff left; I was with L.B. when I was checking the office. The guards were in place. Next the day guards were allowed to leave. I agreed with L.B., the head of the police station, that he would do an inspection of the upper quarters while I would check the lower quarters. Everything was normal. Nothing worth reporting on death row. Then I called out to a guard and we sat in the office to finish the registers. Shortly thereafter I called T.A., the accomplice guard who fled (editor's note: he had been transferred from Barika prison on 6 March 1993), so he would help me serve meals to the death row prisoners. This was about 30 minutes before breakfast. We went to the kitchen and we were even helped by four prisoners to carry the meals with us. Upon my return I asked him to help the four prisoners and accompany them to the death row prisoners' cells. There were 10 common prisoners sentenced to death in the cells. They came back a few minutes later. At that time I accompanied them to serve the meals to the death row prisoners on top. Then I turned over the keys to the kitchen to T.A. for him to close it and have the prisoners come into room 14. I returned to my office. Next they came back and returned the keys to me. L.B. and T.A. came to break the fast with me. Five minutes remained. I was standing and suddenly I heard cries. I left my office. Two minutes remained before the breakfast hour. I must tell you I had previously agreed with the wall guard that he would alert me to the breaking of the fast so I could sound the bell to inform the prisoners. I was just at the door to my office. At that precise moment two accomplice guards came towards me, they were Z.B. and H.B. They were armed and they said: "Raise your hands. Hands up."

I was surprised, then I regained my composure and I tried to close the door to the office. L.B. did the same by helping me close the door. They were stronger than we were and they managed to get in. I threw myself onto H.B. who had an automatic pistol. It was an old weapon. It doesn't belong to the prison. I tried to take it away from him with L.B.'s assistance. While we were fighting, H.B. said "Leave me. I swear to you that no one will get killed." I didn't want to because I had my doubts. Physically he's stronger than I am. He put the weapon to my head. The bullet grazed me. I fell. I got up to leave. He or the other accomplice guard fired at me a second time. I managed to reach the detention square and I heard other gunshots in the office. There was no prison guard on duty, no guard. They made them go into a cell that was closed behind them (editor's note: who brought these guards in? Were there only two accomplices in this detention quarter?).

I think these two accomplices first locked up the guards before coming towards us. As I was running I met a prisoner we employ. He gave me the key to one cell and told me: "Hide here. Otherwise they're going to kill you." Then from there I returned to a control post.

I was frantic. I phoned the switchboard, the director's house, main gate No. 1, wall 4: no answer. I contacted, still by

telephone, wall No. 3. The guard answered, I asked him to get back to wall 5, to contact those in charge. At wall 5, there was no answer. Finally...I thought all the guards had been killed. I've been there 11 years...The two accomplices have been there for about three years...They stay here but they live far away..

M.M.: "I Only Had 10 Bullets"

I was on duty at wall No. 3. At 1830, I received from the guard on duty at wall No. 7 the chronology register, which I was supposed to sign, as usual, then in turn I handed it over to the guard at wall No. 8.

A few minutes later, I was supposed to go downstairs to get my breakfast plate. I was walking past wall No. 8. My colleague asked me to hand the chronology register to the agent on duty at wall No. 4. There was nobody there. I came up to wall No. 5 where guards L.B. and Z.A. were (editor's note: the accomplice). I handed the register over to them. They had three breakfast platters. I asked them to give one of them to me so I wouldn't have to be away from my post for a long time and since they were next to the mess hall. Z.A. gave me one of them.

Next I got back to the post, it was time to break the fast, and I heard rounds of gunfire. I called my colleague at wall No. 8.

Next the phone rang. The chief warned us to come down to wall No. 5, below which is main gate No. 2, which provides access to the detention area.

I loaded my MAS 51. I had 10 bullets. As I was loading it, the phone rang a second time. The same supervisor asked us to call the director and come down quickly to wall No. 5.

I called the director, there was no answer. Then, together with my colleague, we went downstairs. Hardly had we crossed wall No.8 when we saw a blue K66 truck that was moving alongside the wall; a man fired at us with an automatic pistol.

Unless I'm mistaken, he was carrying some of the dead because white sheets were covering some human forms. Personally I fired back with two bullets. Once we arrived at gate No. 2, we experienced rounds of gunfire. We responded until our ammunition was used up. I had two bullets left because my weapon jammed.

I climbed up wall No. 5 where I found B. We stayed between walls 4 and 5 until the security forces came; we were without ammunition. I'm an agent on probation. I'm unable to recognize the five accomplices because I don't even know them. Together with my colleague, I saw we were the only ones still alive. I had decided to jump over the wall. The only one who could respond was the guard who was kidnapped. He was at the right-hand observation post and had a Thompson and some ammunition. In my opinion the bodies on the truck were those of the attackers he had shot.



Our photograph shows main gate No. 2 through which one gets directly to the detention areas. Where the two X's appear is where the two accomplice guards were: one on top of the enclosure wall (he had just abandoned his post at wall No. 4) and the other in front of the gate. The arrow indicates the path taken by the first accomplice guard who came from the kitchen and was heading towards main gate No. 1. "The coffee's ready," he would tell his two accomplices.

Photo Caption

Behind main gate No. 2 (photograph 1) are the detention areas. To the right the infirmary. To the left, the "youth quarter" cell block. In the background the detention quarter with its four stories. Just behind this building are other common rooms and the death row. [photo not reproduced]

Prison Director Says Warnings Not Heeded

94AF0170A Algiers *LIBERTE* in French 18-19 Mar 94 p 2

[Article by Khadidja Zeghloul, Samir Knayaz, and Ryad Kramdi: "First Truth Gathered From the Director of the Prison: 'Warning Signals Were Not Taken Seriously'"]

[Text] He is still clearly in shock and his drawn face and eyes reddened by a week of insomnia convey the man's total confusion and stupefaction. No, he can tell the press nothing. "You have to see the interministerial commission in charge of the inquiry."

Nevertheless the director of the Tazoult prison confirmed for us that he had sent several reports to the justice minister in which he alerted the agency that he reported to about the urgency of improving security at the Lambese prison. The first of his letters was dated two years ago and thus coincides with the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. Faced with this phenomenon, which was becoming greater and greater, and even attacking several prisons, it was necessary, he wrote, to step up security measures. Despite the precedents of Sidi-Ghiles and the Batna prison from which Islamic fundamentalist prisoners were reported to have escaped in 1983, according to the local newspaper *EL-ATLAS*, and despite the revolts and attacks on prisoner convoys, the director of the Tazoult prison got no response. None.

All the same, that silence was disturbing when you consider that that prison housed hardened terrorists while maintaining an absolutely ordinary security force. Recently the cries for help from Tazoult's director had become urgent. He frankly feared what finally happened: a full-fledged attack on the prison. What in particular had added urgency to his alarm?

Besides the general security situation, persistent rumors had reached him describing imminent attacks on the prison in which Islamic fundamentalist prisoners serve their sentences. These rumors even specified the date of the "release" operations: they were scheduled initially for 27 December, in commemoration of the so-called clean and honest elections.

Why, given current political and security conditions, were these things not taken seriously? "I do not understand," the director says simply. Returning to the circumstances of the attack and breakout, he told us that he was with his family in their home at the prison when the first gunshots were fired. "I had just broken the fast when armed men, whose number I cannot give precisely, began their assault." The vehicles used (light ones or trucks), he would continue, remained outside, whereas the police station and gendarme brigade were under siege and the village surrounded. "They had taken up their positions all around in the various neighborhoods and were letting off rounds of gunfire as a diversion at the time we were attacked."

Outside reinforcements, coming basically from Batna, he added, "only arrived on the scene at around 2100. Over 3 or 4 km, the road was torn up in places and strewn with nails in others. Vehicles left on the pavement also blocked the road." But this, in his eyes, does not justify such a delay, all the more so, he went on to tell us, because in the city of Batna there are air forces. "The two helicopters they have there could easily get to the village in the space of two or three minutes and step in, but that did not happen."

In his reports to the Justice Ministry, the director of the prison mentioned his suspicions with regard to certain guards. These suspicions turned out to be well founded: five of the guards took the key to the grounds with the attackers and the terrorist prisoners. Tazoult's director is sure of it: these five guards were accomplices; they took part in the attack. So they are not hostages, as the laconic communiqué from the Justice Ministry stated. Yes, everything seems highly unusual, beginning with the huge delay the security forces took before stepping in. Returning to the breakout, only the prison's two small gates had been opened by staff who were accomplices. It was at that moment that certain guards and the prison director himself, from his home, tried to resist, but the attackers outnumbered them: "one of my men would die in the scuffle and three others were wounded."

The gunshots of the attackers were interspersed, according to our informant, by shouts of "Allahu Akbar, We will live or we will die."

"I don't understand a thing," the director repeats. No one understands how this announced attack on a prison that was supposed to be impregnable, and in which the most dangerous terrorists, those from Guemmar and Bechar, were incarcerated, could have been carried off with such alarming ease. Yes, highly unusual.

Batna 'Tense' Following Escape

94AF0170B Algiers *LIBERTE* in French 18-19 Mar 94 p 2

[Article by Khadidja Zeghloul, Samir Knayaz, and Ryad Kramdi: "Batna Has Still Not Shaken Off Its Lethargy"—first paragraph: is *LIBERTE* introduction]

[Text] It has been more than a week since the spectacular attack on the Tazoult (Lambese) prison. The tension is still high in Batna.

The queen of the Aures Mountains, the attractive city of Batna, which until recently was still a little haven of peace, is now living in anguish and fear. This can be easily read on the drawn faces of its residents. It has now been more than a week since Thursday, 10 March, at about 1900, when "a squadron" made up of 150 to 200 terrorists attacked the well-known high security prison (the Tazoult Lambese Detention Center) and freed about 900 prisoners, among them dangerous terrorists sentenced to death by the special courts, mainly for murders. This prison, which houses approximately 2,200 detainees, is located less than 15 km from downtown Batna, making it a prime refuge for certain escapees.

Besides, some of them were found and captured in town. This is basically why the residents of Batna are afraid. It is a fear that set in very early and continues to turn Batna into a town that is virtually dead.

Elsewhere, in Tazoult, where the prison is located, the pot-holed streets are still wet with last night's rain.

In the square opposite the prison, some young men are playing with a ball. A herd of goats and sheep walks lazily by.

A few more minutes go by and a gate at Lambese opens: About 50 guards emerge in a quick procession—these guards were on duty during the attack—and, as they push on, they just raise their hands to stop any questioning: "I have nothing to say"; only those who were not on duty that night agree to talk about the event. But there, in their neighborhood, they saw only shadows moving taking up positions in the village's dark streets. As was only proper, the attackers had cut off electric current. How many of them were there? "A great many," "they came in groups from everywhere," pushing aside the few residents who were still in the street when the fast was broken. At each entrance to the city of Batna checkpoints were set up. If in downtown you could mention two permanent gendarme roadblocks staffed by several men armed with Kalashnikovs, as you entered the city, coming from Barika, as on the road leading towards the village of Tazoult Lambese, much more impressive means were deployed. At the two ends of the city, the army was on the watch, backed up by tanks and big troop carrier trucks. Just about every vehicle was gone over with a fine-toothed comb, with taxis given "special treatment." The same thing for passengers.

The more careful checking of taxis can doubtless be explained by the fact that many vehicles of this type had been stolen from their owners by the terrorists at the time of the attack. They had even stolen identification papers and sometimes citizens' professional cards.

At regular intervals, helicopters belonging to the gendarmerie and the National People's Assembly (APN) fly over the region, most particularly the many mountains and vast stretches. Indeed, these flights take place in practically every wilaya bordering on Batna. The first planes we could see were patrolling over the plains of the Setif, about 150 km away from Batna.

However, we were told, the principal mission of these helicopters is to ensure air coverage for troops carrying out sweeps searching for groups of escapees and attackers, a goodly number of whom, if certain information is to be believed, are still entrenched in the Aures Mountains. According to leaked information, numerous caches have been discovered and food and medicines as well as bedding have been recovered. On the road linking Setif to Batna, going through Barika, the first and only major roadblock has been set up by soldiers and gendarmes as you leave the village of Megra slightly more than 100 km before Batna.

Objectives of Prison Break Discussed

94AF0170C Algiers EL WATAN in French 15 Mar 94
pp 1, 3

[Article by Mohamed Loughali: "The Tazoult Prison Breakout: 26 Escapees Killed and 114 Captured"—first paragraph is EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] The escape of close to a thousand prisoners from the Tazoult prison represents the worst humiliation a government could experience, a government whose absence in

recent weeks in the area of security had greatly eroded what little popular support remained.

Almost one year to the day later, and using the same tactics used at Boughzoul, the Tazoult prison, formerly Lambese, supposedly an impregnable fortress, was attacked by an armed group made up of about 100 individuals. The toll: the escape of close to 1,000 prisoners, 64 of them from the high security ward set aside for those sentenced to death, and 400 prisoners serving life sentences.

Of the 1,000 escapees, 200 are ordinary prisoners if you believe that the Islamic fundamentalists sentenced by the special courts are not. Beyond the fact that this will mean that the armed groups' capacity to do harm, which is already great, will be increased by 1,000, it seems that the sophisticated operation, from the organizational and timing points of view, had three objectives.

The first aimed at freeing "mujahadeen" brothers locked up in government prisons to prove that that government was incapable of operating on the road of God's will controlled by the armed groups. The second aimed at swelling the armed groups' numbers so as to prepare a new stage in the military action in order to attack strategic, generally "well-guarded" targets.

And last, the choice of Tazoult was heavy with symbolism, in which the megalomania of the emirs takes such delight. They could have operated in Berrouaghia, where the number of Islamic fundamentalist prisoners is the same.

They could have chosen El Harrach so the escapees could blend in more easily with city crowds. They opted for Tazoult because it is the best protected prison and has a reportedly infallible alarm system, has 200 guards, and that in 10 years has recorded just one escape. But above and beyond all these obstacles, which will feed the armed groups' invincibility myth and maintain the feeling of terror that is paralyzing people, the choice of Lambese might be explained by its proximity to Batna, the home town of Zeroual, who, in their eyes, wants to stab the emirs in the back by carrying on discussions with politicians who have never left the sweet comforts of their living room or their cell, depending.

Everyone had noticed this desertion by the state from the scene. Some spoke of a tactical withdrawal, others of a Machiavellian strategy to draw all of society into the anti-terrorist struggle. But for some as well as for others, the Tazoult breakout is a slap in the face that will long echo in the corridors of the presidency, the corridors of government headquarters, or even those of the Ali Khodja barracks. In the wake of the economic collapse, political improvisation, and the suspicion weighing on its judiciary faced with its stubbornness about not opening its corruption files, now this state is seeing its institutions demonstrate their inability to manage the detention of 3,000 law breakers.

The Lambese breakout challenges us in many ways. Even if we granted that the few hundred attackers possessed some military genius, the prison is supposed to be guarded by 200 security guards.

Furthermore, if we remember the account given in the Justice Ministry's communique, there were reported to have been one guard killed, four others wounded, and seven

carried off by the attackers; if we add the two supposed accomplices, this would produce a total of 14; so where were the 186 others?

Revolt at the Constantine Prison

In addition, a trustworthy source has told us that the operation's main instigator, whose identity has not been revealed to us, is a prison guard who was supposedly thrown out of the army because of assumptions that he belonged to the Said Mekhloufi group, even if the proof was not there. The security forces were reported to have informed the central prison authorities on several occasions, in vain.

Here is another disturbing fact: the same authorities did not take seriously the warning that the revolt at the civilian prison in Constantine gave them 15 days ago, to improve the security forces around prison facilities, especially those housing Islamic fundamentalists reputed to be dangerous. Furthermore, it has been learned that instructions had been issued at the Justice Ministry to avoid any concentration of Islamic fundamentalists.

Apparently these instructions were not carried out. In a normal country, a breakout on this scale, where there would be no similar case, would have led to the resignation of the minister of justice, but Algeria long ago ceased being a normal country.

What is left is the war of the communiques. Nearly 72 hours had to pass before a communique from the Justice Ministry would make public information previously reported by AFP and picked up by the national press.

The contents of the communique gave no precise figure for the number of attackers or the number of escapees, and even less regarding their identities.

AFP's source spoke of 900 escapees and 150 attackers. From Bonn, an Islamic Salvation Front [FIS] spokesman for his part spoke of the escape of 1,684 "political prisoners from FIS's base."

Officially the manhunt that began right after the end of the armed operation led to the arrest of 114 escapees and attackers whereas 26 others were reported to have been shot. The figures given by the FIS are not very credible, since they refer to there being some 350 prisoners sentenced to death among the escapees.

Now the total of capital punishment sentences handed down by the special courts amounts to 402, close to 300 of whom were sentences in absentia. So the figure of 64 prisoners sentenced to death seems the more credible one.

The search operations are being carried out mainly in the Aures Mountains even if the FIS's spokesman has said that the escapees have already spread throughout all of Algeria. There is talk of a large group that has reportedly been located in the Jijel area and of another in the Laghouat area.

That is to say, the logistics required to make a success of the operation.

Prisoner 'Echanfara' Reportedly Recaptured

94AF0170D Algiers EL MOUDJAHID in French
16 Mar 94 p 2

[Article by Mon'oud Benmohamed: "The Hunt for the Escapees"—first two paragraphs are EL MOUDJAHID introduction]

[Text] With the arrest of "Echanfara," fugitives are becoming prisoners.

Like bread rolls when they cost 1 Algerian dinar, the daily national newspapers are much in demand by residents of Batna, who want to know more about the prisoner escape at the Tazoult prison.

For the time being, they make do with the little information that has been published, with the grapevine, and comments made by young people and the unemployed who spend their time watching the military roadblock set up on the road to Khenchela, about 4 km from the main gate at the Lambese prison.

They are credulous and hope they will witness the arrest of escapees. Any one of the latter who would venture to return to the scene of the crime, the most spectacular that Batna has had to experience in ages, would be very naive.

Often their eyes as well as those of the majority of citizens are glued to the skies watching the National People's Army's MI-8 helicopters searching for the escaped prisoners. For some, the bird has flown the coop while for others it is certain that the escaped prisoners—particularly the last ones who got out of Lambese who fled across the fields on foot—are still hiding in town. Neither is entirely wrong. Why?

First, because it has been confirmed by the escaped and ultimately arrested prisoners that trucks and light vehicles awaited the most important among the escapees (those sentenced to death by the special courts) so as to provide them with quick transportation. The other prisoners (common criminals and special courts) skedaddled with the help of their legs. The revelations of those arrested, which we will publish in our next issue, do show that according to "rank," i.e., the sentence, each escapee was accorded special treatment by the attackers.

Next, because the search operations carried out by the combined police forces on the outskirts of Batna made it possible to state that the attackers and the escapees—at least some of them—are not far, but they are reported to have dispersed: on Monday, at their 500 residential unit building in downtown Batna, security forces received information on the presence of one—"very dangerous"—of the escapees; the following day (that is, yesterday), the famous "Echanfara," sentenced to 77 years in prison in connection with several cases, returned to his cell.

We should add that there exists a second "Echanfara" who was sentenced to death and is—still—incarcerated in...Berrouaghia. On the subject of cells, let us point out that those in bloc 12 in the Lambese prison were completely torn up (bedding, etc.) by both prisoners and those who escaped. Everywhere there are signs of bullets. On the walls, on the ground, on the gates, the attackers were sufficiently armed, especially with munitions. The majority were young men—aged 20 to 22—supervised by even better armed "individuals." One of them had an RPJ. We will come back to this.

Whether it be at the staff management or the prison guard level, everyone is deeply affected by this "catastrophe" that has befallen the Lambese prison, which had the reputation of being a citadel. Everyone says that accomplices inside the prison had a fatal influence. Some guards were not expecting such "treason" on the part of colleagues whom they had rubbed shoulders with for years, whereas others believe that "hardship is good for something," inasmuch as today all the authorities are being careful.

The commission of inquiry that has been set up spent yesterday at the site of the breakout, where it listened to evidence and statements by prison staff.

We shall return to this.

Escape From Lambese; 'Secrets' Revealed

Eyewitness Account

94AF0169A Algiers EL WATAN in French 18-19 Mar 94
pp 1, 3

[Article signed by "Ghania Oukazi" and "T.H.": "Lambese: Secrets From the Breakout"—first two paragraphs are EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] Despite the numerous scenarios that have been advanced with regard to the famous breakout, we have not heard the last word about Lambese.

An eyewitness who was present on the scene was willing to provide us with certain secrets that, in his mind, make up a large-scale act of treason.

Tazoult—from our special envoys—"No one can be proud of what happened at Lambese; I never thought treason on that scale could ever take place," we were told by this witness who is still, even today, very shaken by everything he saw.

Indeed, from the standpoint of its reputation, the Tazoult prison has always been termed an impregnable citadel. The prison was worthy of being an "Alcatraz"! Here is an account of one of the most mysterious breakouts.

Everything seemed normal in this peaceful town with its Islamic majority. On Thursday, 10 March, at around 1700, close to 300 persons armed with Kalashnikovs spilled into this small town in the Aures Mountains. Working with a plan that had long been drawn up in minute detail, they divided up into groups, each one charged with carrying out a well defined task.

The first task was first to isolate Lambese from neighboring areas by setting up two roadblocks, one on the road leading to Batna and the other on the Khenchela road.

Furthermore two vehicles, one a yellow J5, the other a "Lada," went separately to the only gendarmerie post and

police station. The terrorists' goal was to neutralize all security forces. Neither gendarmes nor police officers resisted.

Other terrorists dispersed throughout Tazoult's narrow streets to prevent its residents from leaving.

As for the prison, it was besieged by about 100 of the men who began by parking two "Sonacome"-make trucks in front of the main gate. This gate had been cordially opened by a guard by the name of Benoui who was an accomplice.

To reach the second gate, which opened onto the detention areas, i.e., the cells, the attackers were aided by two other guards.

In fact, then and there, Lagoune (a former commando) and another guard, both natives of Barika, killed their colleague guarding the second gate who was "not part of the deed."

When he heard the shots, the director, Mohamed Latrache, called Hama, who is also nicknamed "I-don't-give-a-damn," ran out of his house that was next to the prison's first gate. "Why have you shot our colleague?" he asked Lagoune.

In response, the latter shot the director twice, failing to hit him. From that moment on, the top prison official completely vanished into thin air. He reappeared only when the investigation committee arrived. However, he was the only one in possession of the keys to the place where the heavy weapons, especially three FMPKs, were stored. Once the two gates were opened, the attackers burst into the inner detention perimeter by overwhelming 13 guards in charge of overseeing the various cells from 1700 to 0100. They next proceeded to open all the cells in the three death sentence corridors supposed to be as impenetrable as the ways of the Lord.

These corridors cannot accommodate more than 80 death sentence prisoners. The cells have names; some of them are called "high-risk cells," containing 12 prisoners sentenced to death kept chained day and night while there are other low-ceilinged cells where 10 prisoners serving the same sentence are kept as well as the mentally ill who need to be isolated.

In the vicinity a place called the cave could be glimpsed made up of five cells with prisoners sentenced to death. All of these cells were opened as well as eight sections of 50 individual cells, each located in an area called "the junction."

In all there were no fewer than 400 cells housing prisoners serving long terms.

All of these cells were opened by the terrorists with alarming ease.

In this regard, our eyewitness stated that the terrorists carried duplicates of the keys to all the cells. They were keys that had been molded in clay; this is one way of copying the master. However the rules are strict and require that at the end of each guard shift the keys absolutely be returned to the director, who is the only and the sole person responsible for the special box in which they are stored. So each guard turns over the keys to the cells he is in charge of to his station head together with a list of prisoners after having signed the register.

The station head then turns the keys over to the head of detention before ending up with the director.

This process is repeated several times each day, i.e., each time there is a shift of guards.

Out of all the prison's cells, only "the star" and "the lower quarter" were not opened.

"The star" is made up of four common rooms, each one containing 250 people, while the other 10 rooms in "the lower quarter" contain common criminals serving short sentences. All of these people seemed not to be of interest to the attackers since their main goal was to free "the hard core."

Many of the released prisoners had the right to have a weapon. Those sentenced to death were carried in trucks and took the Khenchela road. The attackers also attacked the infirmary so as to free one of their paralyzed "emirs" who was receiving care. Besides, in so doing, they did not hesitate to forcefully "ship out" Kamel Soukhal, the main infirmary attendant, who was serving a 15-year jail term for drug trafficking in Annaba.

The other escapees, who did not enjoy much help from the terrorists, were forced to get to the Ain Touta Mountains on foot. This helped the police, who were deployed three hours later, arrest a great number of them.

However, certain prisoners, not knowing where to go and roaming through the village, were turned over by local residents to the gendarmerie.

One thing is certain and that is that most of the ex-Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) militants who had been jailed for acts of terrorism were freed to the cries of women and the "Allahu Akbars" of men that emerged from some homes.

Throughout the entire operation, the prison's electricity was not shut off and the lights in all the guard towers were lit. This was a fact that, as usual, slowed the breakfast hour back to the same time as the muezzin's call to prayer. Now no guard thought to sound the high emergency alarm siren to alert authorities to what was happening.

In this regard, the surrounding neighborhood remembers the revolt that took place on 27 December 1978 that was brought under control thanks to the signal set off by the high emergency siren. The entire operation was carried out with the blessing of accomplices, the main ones being the three guards, [?Laagoune] and his associates, known as inveterate Islamic fundamentalists.

The witness pointed out that the Lambese prison houses more than 3,000 prisoners and at least 500 guards. Most of the latter are young and inexperienced. "There are some of them who do not even know how to handle a weapon," he said.

Furthermore, and according to the same source, the director, who was named to this position in 1989, does not have the qualifications required to run a prison of this scale. He was formerly the chief electrician in the same jail and has never done guard duty.

Others have charged him with having a regionalist cast of mind with respect to certain guards who come from different tribes in the area. The operation, when all is said and

done, lasted two long hours. The toll was 906 escapees, only about 100 of whom have been captured.

At the end of their deed, the attackers fired five times from the interior of the prison to signal the end of the operation. They left, damaging a segment of the road leading towards Khenchela and to gain time and obstruct any pursuit.

This is the version of the facts as told by the eyewitness.

Furthermore, and as of press time, the commission of inquiry has revealed nothing "official." It headed towards the capital this Thursday. Despite nonstop efforts by reporters, its members have not even deigned to receive them.

A protest letter written by reporters present on the scene was even given to the military authorities in Daina.

As to Lambese's director, still shaken by events, he even received reporters at the entrance to the prison but declined to make any statement in the absence of any official authorization.

For its part, Tazoult has returned to its usual quiet and police left the town three days following the operation. But the sweeps still continue in the mountains as well as the thorough checks. Helicopters fly over the area nonstop.

Even if Tazoult's residents are not about to forget what has recently occurred, that is not preventing them from strolling in the streets, sipping a cup of coffee, or even playing a game of table soccer.

Director Corrects Reporting

94AF0169B Algiers EL WATAN in French 29 Mar 94 p 5

[Letter to the editor from Mr. Latreche, the director of the Lambese prison: "Corrections From the Director"—first paragraph is EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] Following the publication of the article on the Tazoult-Lambese breakout, which appeared in the 18-19 March edition, Mr. Latreche, the prison's director, has sent in the following update:

1. According to information obtained from my departments, the pseudowitness is reported to be a former prisoner who was serving several sentences and was known throughout the area, although no doubt better known for his crimes than for his abilities as a witness and an observer. My comments, in fact, pose the issue of the quality of such information.

The authors of the article, no doubt seeking something sensational, did not fail to accept as truthful information which, far from helping uncover the truth, has not failed to enflame matters with their very debatable stand, all the while offending the professional dignity of those who, like myself, attempt to carry out a dangerous and very difficult mission to serve the interest of public order.

2. According to his statements, 300 individuals armed with Kalashnikovs had entered the village of Tazoult-Lambese at about 1700 according to a plan that had long since been drawn up in minute detail. How could this witness have been in possession of such information?
3. Furthermore, he claims to have seen two (2) vehicles, one yellow J5 and one Lada automobile going towards the

gendarmerie and the police (now between the gendarmerie and the police there is a distance of more than 800 meters as well as buildings).

How could he have seen or known if the two vehicles were driving towards two different places, i.e., towards the gendarmerie and the police?

4. He states he saw two Sonacome-make trucks parked in front of the jail's main gate; so where could he have been?
5. The witness says he saw the director rush out of his house and speak to his guards saying: why have you shot your colleague; he goes on to state that two (2) shots were fired at the director, missing him. Now from the outside you cannot see the director giving orders to his subordinates.

It is up to you to decide where this witness was in order to see and hear everything that was being said (either at the gendarmerie or at the police).

With respect to the professional qualifications of the current director, it should be stated that his professional skills and background are known to the prison administration and in particular to his employer, who is in a better position to appreciate his competence and service record.

Regionalism has never been one of the professional criteria known to one and all.

Among other qualifications, the current director is an electrician and has in addition a proven record of 27 years of administrative experience.

I supply this correction so your readers and public opinion may have the right information.

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